

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 5, 2023

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S. W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write to you today regarding the ongoing drought conditions in the state of Missouri and the impending forage and feed crisis facing farm families in our state.

Over 80 percent of Missouri is currently experiencing drought conditions, with more than half of the state experiencing severe drought and nearly 20 percent suffering under extreme drought conditions.<sup>1</sup> While current conditions are concerning, this current crisis has been building for months.

Many farmers have been facing moderate to severe drought conditions for much of the growing season. As a result, available forage in pastures and hay crop yields are far below typical for our state. Farmers and ranchers have reported feeding hay to livestock in June, long before Missouri farmers typically begin feeding hay in November.<sup>2</sup>

The acute shortage of quality hay and forage due to drought conditions has led to a concerning uptick in scams targeting farm families desperate to feed their herds. While many farmers and ranchers have grazed or hayed just about every square inch of available forage, acres enrolled in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) remain a largely untapped emergency relief valve.

While emergency grazing has been opened in some counties experiencing the most extreme drought conditions, it can be challenging for farmers to take advantage of these flexibilities. In many cases, these CRP lands do not have adequate fencing or water access for livestock. That forces already struggling farmers and ranchers to break their backs trying to build fence and haul water to care for their herds.

Faced with this daunting challenge, many have resigned themselves to selling off portions of their herds. In many cases, these families have spent generations building herd numbers and refining genetics to maximize the quality and quantity of production. Forcing these families to sell their herds or watch them starve will have devastating impacts on our communities for decades to come. Compounded with the other challenges facing farm families, including rising

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<sup>1</sup> National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (2023, June 27). *U.S. Drought Monitor*.

<sup>2</sup> Vargo, A. (2023, June 21). Hay scammers trick Missouri farmers into buying nonexistent bales. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

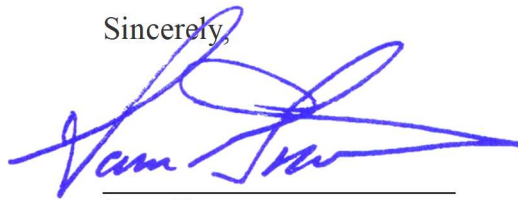
interest rates and astronomical input costs, this crisis threatens the very foundations of our agricultural economy.

We understand that emergency haying practices may be opened in some limited areas after the end of the primary nesting season on July 15<sup>th</sup>, but we have grave concerns that the quality or forage available for haying could substantially decline within the coming weeks.

**For these reasons, we urge you to explore all available options to immediately open CRP lands in Missouri to emergency haying to provide sufficient forage for livestock.**

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have questions, please contact Jonathan Harder, Legislative Director for Congressman Sam Graves, at [jonathan.harder@mail.house.gov](mailto:jonathan.harder@mail.house.gov) or (202) 225-7041.

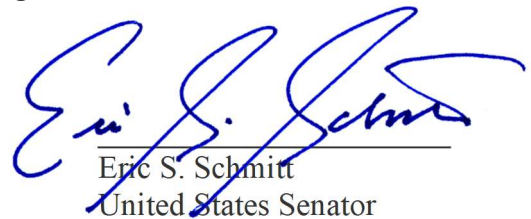
Sincerely,



Sam Graves  
Member of Congress



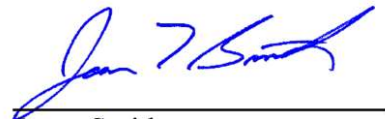
Josh Hawley  
United States Senator



Eric S. Schmitt  
United States Senator



Blaine Luetkemeyer  
Member of Congress



Jason Smith  
Member of Congress



Mark Alford  
Member of Congress



Eric Burlison  
Member of Congress